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*Which one lives?  
And which one dies?  
We ask ourselves each day.  
Which ones are cute?  
Which ones are trained?  
For they will get to stay.*

— Judy Johannsen,  
supervisor,  
Moline Animal Shelter

**A** deafening frenzy greets the guest to the dog room at the Moline Animal Shelter. The cream-colored Chow, the Doberman-Rottweiler mix and the small red cocker spaniel bark wildly with others to form a panicky chorus for attention. They seem to know that the visitor may take one of them home.

But many of these animals will die. Even the healthy ones could be euthanized if no one wants them. Here's a typical scenario: A family lets a pet give birth to at least one litter so that the kids can witness it, then takes the puppies or kittens to the shelter.

"They say, 'I want them to experience the joy of birth.' I say, 'What about the miracle of death?'" says Judy Johannsen, supervisor of the Moline shelter.

"So many times I say I can't take it anymore. It builds up into an anger because people just don't care. We beg them to take their pets back, but they expect you to do the miracle.

"And if you can't, you're the murderer."

About half of the 900 cats, dogs and wild animals that have come to the shelter in 1993 have been put to sleep. They were unwanted and abused or aggressive and dangerous to people. About a quarter of the animals find new homes, and another quarter are picked up by their owners.

Ms. Johannsen and three community service officers — Liz Watson, Al Silverman and Martin Engh — are supervised by Capt. Vic Endress of the Moline Police Department. They have seen it all — the dogs with bloody, bug-infested ears; the Doberman frozen in its doghouse because the owner thought its fur would keep it warm through the winter.

The cats are another story. Often, they are turned loose on the streets and scrounge neighborhoods for food to survive. If caught, they end up squirming and squealing in competition



Brandon Treanor, 5, Rock Island, hugs Sadie, a dog his family adopted from the Moline Animal Shelter. Many animals at the shelter would make great family pets if given the chance, shelter workers say.

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for attention at the animal shelter.

A small orange-and-white kitten scales the chain-link cage before falling back to the bottom and trying again. A cream-colored cat with golden eyes gently reaches a paw through the fencing to touch an outstretched human hand.

The dank room will be remodeled as part of a \$100,000 renovation and expansion at the shelter that began this summer.

"So many people think it's all right to feed a dog or a cat every other day, but it's not," Ms. Johannsen says. "That's abuse. There's no excuse for that kind of ignorance in animal care. Excuses don't hold up. . . . People say, 'Don't tell my kids this is where I brought their pet' if they call and ask because they'll think bad of me.' I feel like saying, 'Well, I think bad of you.'"

*This cat won't use the litter box;*

*His foot's infected, too.*

*The vet costs too much money*

*So I brought him down to you.*

Ms. Watson says far fewer animals would have to be euthanized if more people would adopt a pet from the shelter, or if more people had their pets spayed or neutered. The animal-shelter staff has proposed a mandatory citywide spay and neuter policy and is waiting for it to be presented to the city council.

After 14 years in animal control, Ms. Watson still cries sometimes when she has to give a healthy, yet unwanted, dog or cat a lethal injection to the heart.

One former shelter worker, though, euthanized every animal on Fridays so that he would not have to clean the cages over the weekend, she says.

"Sometimes I think I'd like to find another job, but who would come here and work? Would it be someone who cares? You have to think about the animal's quantity and quality of life. What's right and what's wrong?"

"These animals are unwanted; some of the reasons are stupid and some are valid, but you have to be responsible and do something. (Former owners) put the responsibility on us. If I never had to do it

again, I'd be ecstatic because I could stop killing animals."

By law, stray or abandoned animals can be euthanized after five days at the shelter, but a good share of the cats and dogs there live at least 30 days while shelter workers and volunteers try to find new homes for them.

Some can be killed immediately: vicious animals, wild cats that have had no contact with humans, animals left at the shelter by their owners. Cat carcasses are sold for research, and the money they bring goes toward shelter operations. Dogs are cremated.

Shelter workers screen animals to determine whether they would make good pets. Those that make the cut are sometimes kept much longer. Adoption fees are \$50 for dogs and cats that require shots and spaying or neutering. An animal that is already fixed and has its rabies shot costs \$8.

"The animals come to love and trust you, and sooner or later, you pull them out and you kill them," Ms. Watson says. "It's nothing you ever get over, and it's always the first thing people ask you about."

*I hold your pet; I pat his head;*

*I feel his heart beat steady.*

*He's six months old; he has to die;*

*God knows he isn't ready.*

Hair and moist spots mark the white table where the animals are euthanized.

Ms. Watson mixes several solutions in two hypodermic needles, one to tranquilize a dog, one to kill it. She and Mr. Silverman hold the dog and inject the tranquilizer into its leg. In a few minutes, the dog goes limp, its tongue hanging slightly from its mouth.

Ms. Watson presses on the dog's chest with her fingers, searching for a heartbeat. She pushes the needle through the fur, beneath the skin and into the heart. Blood rushes into the hypodermic, mingling with the phenobarbital that will end the dog's life.

With a stethoscope, Ms. Watson checks for signs of life. Once the heart has stopped, Mr. Silverman cradles the dog into a plastic garbage bag and ties the top before placing it in the freezer.

"It's the puppies and the year-old dogs that get to you," Ms. Watson says, choking on the words. "We get one a home, two more come. That's how it goes."

The lines of poetry were excerpted from "Who Am I?" by Judy Johannsen.